

WHAT I WOULD SAY AS AN OPENLY GAY, ORDAINED PRESBYTERIAN MINISTER IF I HAD BEEN INVITED TO SPEAK AT PRESBYTERY*

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2) At first minorities are looked upon as lesser numbers, then as different, then as unnatural or even abnormal. We have seen this in America's treatment of women, in the treatment of racial, ethnic, religious minorities. While all minorities suffer discrimination, their feelings, their perceptions, are different and these differences make it difficult for minorities to bond together to fight discrimination.

3) When a minority seeks to be heard, centuries of vocabulary created by the majority enforce a barrier that prevents understanding. This can be seen in the PCUSA today. The words created by the majority, "active, practicing, lifestyle choice" are used to describe us as sex machines rather than people with a minority sexual orientation. These terms have no meaning in **any** sexual orientation. I will presume most of you who are reading this are heterosexual. Was there a day in your preteen or teen years when you woke up, yawned and stretched, got out of bed and said to yourself, "I think I'll be heterosexual"? If this was not your experience, then how can you presume that it was mine? The vocabulary created by the majority creates such a barrier to honest, open discussion of sexual orientation precisely because you define the terms with which you consign us to live.

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Juno e-mail printed Fri, 27 Jun 1997 11:16:13 , page 1

From: revmarge
Full-Name: Marjorie F Ragona
To: PURPLEPV3@aol.com
Subject: UfmccHq@aol.com: UFMCC ANNOUNCES SOLIDARITY WITH "EUCHARISTIC FAST"
X-Status: New
X-Mailer: Juno 1.15

----- Begin forwarded message -----

From: UfmccHq@aol.com
To: undisclosed-recipients;
Subject: UFMCC ANNOUNCES SOLIDARITY WITH "EUCHARISTIC FAST"
Date: Fri, 27 Jun 1997 12:47:14 -0400 (EDT)
Message-ID: <970627124013_-1261034424@emout13.mail.aol.com>

>From The Universal Fellowship
of Metropolitan Community Churches

NEWS RELEASE
For Immediate Release, Please

UFMCC ANNOUNCES SOLIDARITY WITH
PRESBYTERIAN GAY & LESBIAN "EUCHARISTIC FAST"

Los Angeles -- The Universal Fellowship of Metropolitan Community Churches (UFMCC), the world's largest denomination devoted to affirming ministry to gays and lesbians, has extended an invitation for gay and lesbian Presbyterians to receive Holy Communion at any of UFMCC's 300 local congregations.

The invitation was extended by the Rev. Elder Nancy Wilson, vice-moderator of UFMCC and a long-time ecumenical activist, in response to the recently issued "Call to Eucharistic Fast" by noted Presbyterian author, speaker and activist Chris Glaser. Glaser has proposed the fast to embody protest against Amendment B of the Presbyterian Church (USA), which denies full church participation to gays and lesbians.

"Our Communion Table is open to all God's people," Wilson said. "During this time of Eucharistic Fast, gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgendered Presbyterians of conscience may partake of the Sacrament of Holy Communion at any UFMCC congregation with the full knowledge that our community of faith unreservedly affirms and celebrates their spirituality, conscience, and God-given sexuality."

"I have known Chris Glaser for many years," added Wilson. "I have observed his ministry and his spiritual devotion, and benefitted from his friendship and wise counsel. As I read his "Call To Eucharistic Fast," I found myself deeply moved by the plight of my Presbyterian sisters and brothers. Chris' words are powerful and prophetic, especially as he writes:

"Paul wrote that those who "eat and drink without discerning the body

eat
and drink judgment against themselves" (I Corinthians 11:29). Though he
may
also mean without discerning the sacred dimension of the sacrament, it is
suggested by the context that he means without discerning one's
connection to
other Christians (see 11:17-22). The Presbyterian Church (USA) practices
a
Communion in which Presbyterians do not discern their equal relationship
with
lesbian and gay, bisexual and transgendered Christians. So I will not
partake. If we all...who reject Amendment B fast from Communion, think
how
moving such a visible sign of the brokenness of Christ's Body would be.
Please prayerfully consider this."

In his "Call To Eucharistic Fast," Glaser also wrote, "I'm so glad so
many of
you share the same passion for Communion that I have, a passion that will
prompt me to seek it out among...other lesbian, gay, bisexual and
transgendered Christian groups and congregations, as well as Christian
communities that do not forbid full membership to us."

Founded in 1968, UFMCC is composed of more 42,000 members in 300 local
congregations in 19 countries. Presbyterians seeking Communion with an
MCC
congregation may contact UFMCC denominational headquarters by at e-mail
at
UFMCCHQ@aol.com for the location of an MCC congregation.

(E N D)

For Additional Information, Contact:
James N. Birkitt, Jr.
UFMCC Director of Communications
Universal Fellowship of Metropolitan Community Churches
8704 Santa Monica Boulevard, 2nd Floor
West Hollywood, CA 90069
Phone: (310) 360-8640
Fax: (310) 360-8680
E-mail: UFMCCCHQ@aol.com

Release Date: June 27, 1997

----- End forwarded message -----

From: UfmccHq@aol.com

Received: from x9.boston.juno.com (x9.boston.juno.com [205.231.100.25])

by m4.boston.juno.com (8.8.6.Beta0/8.8.6.Beta0/2.0.kim) with ESMTP id MAAAA25684
for <RevMarge@juno.com>; Fri, 27 Jun 1997 12:48:45 -0400 (EDT)

Received: from emout13.mail.aol.com (emout13.mx.aol.com [198.81.11.39])

by x9.boston.juno.com (8.8.6.Beta0/8.8.6.Beta0/2.0.kim) with ESMTP id MAAAA20716;
Fri, 27 Jun 1997 12:48:31 -0400 (EDT)

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by emout13.mail.aol.com (8.7.6/8.7.3/AOL-2.0.0)

id MAA15008;

Fri, 27 Jun 1997 12:47:14 -0400 (EDT)

Return-path: <UfmccHq@aol.com>

To: undisclosed-recipients;

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Message-ID: <970627124013_-1261034424@emout13.mail.aol.com>

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>From The Universal Fellowship
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NEWS RELEASE

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UFMCC ANNOUNCES SOLIDARITY WITH PRESBYTERIAN GAY & LESBIAN "EUCCHARISTIC FAST"

Los Angeles -- The Universal Fellowship of Metropolitan Community Churches (UFMCC), the world's largest denomination devoted to affirming ministry to gays and lesbians, has extended an invitation for gay and lesbian Presbyterians to receive Holy Communion at any of UFMCC's 300 local congregations.

The invitation was extended by the Rev. Elder Nancy Wilson, vice-moderator of UFMCC and a long-time ecumenical activist, in response to the recently issued "Call to Eucharistic Fast" by noted Presbyterian author, speaker and activist Chris Glaser. Glaser has proposed the fast to embody protest against Amendment B of the Presbyterian Church (USA), which denies full church participation to gays and lesbians.

"Our Communion Table is open to all God's people," Wilson said. "During this time of Eucharistic Fast, gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgendered Presbyterians of conscience may partake of the Sacrament of Holy Communion at any UFMCC congregation with the full knowledge that our community of faith unreservedly affirms and celebrates their spirituality, conscience, and God-given sexuality."

"I have known Chris Glaser for many years," added Wilson. "I have observed his ministry and his spiritual devotion, and benefitted from his friendship and wise counsel. As I read his "Call To Eucharistic Fast," I found myself deeply moved by the plight of my Presbyterian sisters and brothers

Chris'

words are powerful and prophetic, especially as he writes:

"Paul wrote that those who "eat and drink without discerning the body, eat and drink judgment against themselves" (I Corinthians 11:29). Though he may also mean without discerning the sacred dimension of the sacrament, it is suggested by the context that he means without discerning one's connection to other Christians (see 11:17-22). The Presbyterian Church (USA) practices a Communion in which Presbyterians do not discern their equal relationship with lesbian and gay, bisexual and transgendered Christians. So I will not partake. If we all...who reject Amendment B fast from Communion, think how moving such a visible sign of the brokenness of Christ's Body would be. Please prayerfully consider this."

In his "Call To Eucharistic Fast," Glaser also wrote, "I'm so glad so many of you share the same passion for Communion that I have, a passion that will prompt me to seek it out among...other lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgendered Christian groups and congregations, as well as Christian communions that do not forbid full membership to us."

Founded in 1968, UFMCC is composed of more 42,000 members in 300 local congregations in 19 countries. Presbyterians seeking Communion with an MCC congregation may contact UFMCC denominational headquarters by at e-mail at UFMCCHQ@aol.com for the location of an MCC congregation.

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Presbyterian AIDS Network

Toward A Theology Of Disease and Compassion

An address by Edgar A. Towne prepared for a workshop on "When AIDS Comes To The Church" given by the Presbytery of Whitewater Valley, (Indiana), on October 28, 1989. Rev. Towne is an ordained Presbyterian minister and Professor of Theology at Christian Theological Seminary in Indianapolis.

We are to reflect together toward a theology of disease and compassion. Theology is thinking with words - getting clear about God and our lives. Compassion is feeling while doing - getting our bodies into our living.

In both prayer and theology we do things with words. (Sometimes there are things too deep for words when the Holy Spirit Intercedes for us and a touch suffices.) A good theology of disease and compassion should help us pray and act with feeling - with compassion for all who suffer from disease. Surely this is our vocation as followers of Jesus. "Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved," Paul wrote "Compassion, kindness, lowliness, meekness, and patience, forbearing one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive." (Col. 3:12)

Paul requires us to be in touch with our feelings. Perhaps you have gotten used to not feeling much at all, particularly when it comes to the forgiveness our Lord secured to us by his atoning death on the Cross. Has a theology hindered this? When was the last time you wept when you "surveyed the wondrous cross" or sang "Amazing Grace"? Tears are the body's speech. In the Bible, "compassion" is a body word. Paul uses the Greek here for "intestines" (in the King James translation "bowels"). To the Philippians (2:1-2) he wrote: "So if there is any encouragement in Christ, any incentive of love, and participation in the Spirit, any bowels and mercies, complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind." In the Hebrew another body word is "womb." Isaiah (49:15) says: "Can a woman forget her sucking child, that she should have no compassion on the son of her womb? Even these may forget, yet I will not forget you." A theology of disease and compassion has to evoke elemental gut feelings.

Disease attacks the body. That is the way it threatens us and why we dread it. In epidemic proportions disease is even more terrifying and can devastate a society, both physically and psycho-socially. When not understood and without a cure, victims as well as disease become an enemy. In Christian Scriptures illness has provided the metaphor underlying the meaning of salvation - wholeness, health, healing. God brings health and salvation, not disease and death.

AIDS (Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome) attacks the body by destroying the T-4 helper cells in the blood which support the body's ability to resist disease. The disease is caused by the human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) which multiplies until the body is unable to protect itself from a host of "opportunistic" infections of various kinds. It is one or more of these infections that kill persons with AIDS. There is no known cure.

In the Bible disease, in whatever proportion, is an estranged aspect of the created order that God is always acting to restore to health. Paul said: "We know that the whole creation has been groaning in travail together until now; and not only the creation but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait for adoption as sons (and daughters), the redemption of our bodies" (Rom. 8:22). When the inspired John saw the holy city, Jerusalem, coming down from heaven, he heard a voice saying "Behold, the dwelling of God is with humankind. He will dwell with them, and they shall be his people and Godself will be with them; God will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning nor crying nor pain any more, for the former things have passed away." And he who sat upon the throne said, "Behold, I make all things new." (Rev. 21:2-5) Our faith teaches us that divine will is accomplished. This is the God we are to put our trust in as followers of Jesus.

Now let's get in touch with our bodies and our theologies. We simply have to resist the temptation to think that God sends disease to punish us. We sinners might do it but not God. When Joseph confronted his brothers in Egypt, he said they meant him evil by their act, but God turned it to good. (Gen. 50:20) It is always a temptation to put God to our own uses, using a person's affliction for moral leverage. But this is a vain effort as the third commandment says. God does not achieve good by doing evil. Paul says that of our evil (and there is plenty of it without God adding to it). God brings good. (Rom. 8:28) If God did inflict evil as well as working good, could we love God, let alone trust God, with all our heart, soul, mind and strength? In our theology of disease let us take heed for God's reputation, taking care to sanctify the divine name, not defile it. It is better, then, to respect the wisdom of James (1:13): "God cannot be tempted with evil and God tempts no one."

How, then, can our theology help us care for persons with AIDS compassionately? Let us stay in touch with our bodies. The HIV virus is spread in only three ways: by blood, by sexual intercourse, by birth. And how was forgiveness won for us by our savior and healer, Jesus Christ? By God

taking upon Godself our flesh, becoming incarnate by birth of Mary, and shedding his blood on the cross. These symbols of our embodiment and very life should have their voice in our theology. The forgiveness Jesus secured by his vicarious sacrifice need not be understood in grotesque ways. Just as God does not send disease as punishment for sin, God does not require bloody sacrifices as a condition of reconciliation. Jesus succumbed without illusions to the evil inflicted upon him by the military power of a Roman governor. Out of this evil God took sin and death upon Godself to break their power as God's own act. This is the strategy of redemption spoken of by Paul and John: Godself assuming our bodies, our blood, our fluids of intercourse and conception, and our birth. Let Jesus' bruised and pain-racked body have its voice that we may feel in our guts the compassion God has had for us. Let it speak of the sufficiency of Christ's sacrifice for the sins of the whole world and so for your and mine.

Persons with AIDS are very sick and will very probably die because of a virus not known until 1983. Persons infected by the HIV virus can look forward to an extended period of suffering that begins with anxiety associated with the knowledge of infection, its etiology, the social stigma associated with it, and if among the "worried well," anticipation of the first symptoms. Some will develop symptoms such as chronic swollen glands, considerable weight loss, chronic diarrhea, lethargy, oral fungal infections. AIDS itself, once diagnosed, is marked by at least one of a number of opportunistic infections like protozoan pneumocystis carinii, combined with malignancies such as Kaposi's sarcoma, brain lymphoma. With the destruction of the body's immune system the person with AIDS faces periods of weakness when he or she cannot care for themselves, frequent hospitalizations, loss of control of bodily functions, pain and disfigurement. Loss of self-esteem, depression, suicidal thoughts, and dementia may be present. With this goes the shock and pain experienced by families, lovers, and friends - people living with AIDS. The fatiguing burden of care, bewilderment about how to minister to these persons, overwhelming medical expenses, and the inevitable grief when the patient

dies combining with his or her suffering makes a gigantic syndrome of suffering. This is the challenge to the church's ministry - its theology and its compassion.

Now think of the suffering of our dear Lord Jesus and its redemptive outcomes in forgiveness of sin and victory over death. Was it sufficient for all this? Think about it. If it wasn't sufficient for all persons and every sin, then maybe you and I and our sins are left out of this atonement. No, atonement has been made from before the foundation of the world (Eph. 1:3-10). Unconditionally for all persons and for all sins. Christ Jesus is a high priest who both offers sacrifice and is the victim sacrificed. "He entered once for all into the Holy Place, taking not the blood of goats and calves but his own blood, thus securing an eternal redemption" (Heb. 9:11-12). Think of how great our God is! Get your body into it! Feel it. Weep over it. Give thanks with compassion and care for persons with AIDS. Paul put it this way (Rom. 12:1-2): "I appeal to you . . . by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. So be not be conformed to this world but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that you may prove what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect."

We may care for persons with AIDS confident of God's love for them and for us. We may be assured that reasonable precautions can protect us from being infected while we care for the sick and that God's redemptive efficacies will reward the search for a medical cure. We are to offer living sacrifices in our care. Jesus offered the only sacrifice unto death required. We are to trust that and entrust others to that. Not all of us may be able personally to undertake this heart-breaking ministry, but we can assist our congregations to do so. And we can prevent additional suffering for persons with AIDS by protecting their human and civil rights."

All of us may be assured that whether in life or in death we remain within the love of God and the divine redemptive life. Disease and death are never the last word about anyone. "None of us lives to himself, and none of us dies to herself," wrote Paul. "If we live, we live to the Lord, and if we die, we die to the Lord; so then, whether we live or whether we die, we are the Lord's. For to this end Christ died and lived again, that he might be Lord both of the dead and of the living." (Rom. 14:7-9).

Rising to New Heights

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Always on the frontiers of social ministries, PHEWA is poised now to tackle some of the tough questions of health and justice confronting the church in the 1990's. As membership grows and the constituency groups continue to focus on their tasks, PHEWA anticipates moving ahead, solidifying its gains and engaging in the struggles both within and outside the church to champion the causes it holds dear. The Biennial next February in Oakland, California, holds great promise to set the Association on its course for this decade. The Association invites any who have a commitment to social justice to join with it in this adventure.



Marilyn Washburn's son, John, takes a nap while his mother works.

SPIRITUALITY AND AIDS

By Juan Alegria

This article appeared in "AIDS At Issue" a newsletter published by Interventions and was reprinted in a similar publication in Wisconsin.

Spirituality is not a synonym for religion. The most poignant expression of this difference that I have ever come across was a prophetic bumper sticker which read: "Religion is for people who are afraid to go to hell; Spirituality is for people who have been there already!"

Yet, it is very difficult for modern women and men to fully appreciate this "subway wall theology." Chronic over-exposure to the David Koreshes and Pat Robertsons of the world has left a painful wound in our soul. Skepticism and cynicism seem the best defense against the fanaticism and judgmentalism spewed by these prophets of doom.

And in the midst of this religious/existential crisis, the HIV/AIDS pandemic hits with catastrophic force. And those who are the most vulnerable and misunderstood are affected in a devastatingly disproportionate manner.

It has taken me almost six years of working closely with persons with HIV/AIDS to feel and understand how an organic spirituality is truly a resource in times of crisis.

First, I had to rid myself of much unresolved shame and guilt from my past. I started working in HIV/AIDS in an unconscious search for self healing. I was a compulsive care taker addicted to trauma. I have now come to feel and understand that I do not have to carry the weight of the world to be whole. I can now see that being thrown out of a hospital room for wearing a badge reading "pastoral counselor," is a shared responsibility for representing two thousand years of articulated negativity toward the marginalized of the world. I no longer feel ashamed, but response-able. It is about owning my part in the injustice and acting differently.

Second, I have come to feel and understand that my proficiency in supporting others has entirely to do

with how I treat myself. Anthony DeMello in his book One Minute Wisdom says that the most important spiritual questions are not who is God or is there life after death but who am I? This is another way of saying that we can not give what we do not have. I can only give respect and love to others if I afford the same to myself. Children are able to act in this powerful and simple manner, before we beat it out of them in the name of education and socialization.

Thus, resolving our own addictive behaviors and the inclusion of a truly integrative and redemptive spirituality are the most important steps in becoming healers and agents of LIFE, as opposed to mere doctors, social workers, pastors, nurses, case managers, intake specialists, and the like.

Deeply centered and peaceful individuals in the helping professions create a habit of working daily with the following principles:

*"NO" is a complete sentence.

*Denial is not a river in Egypt.

*And to paraphrase Robert Fulghum:

Imagination is stronger than Knowledge

Myth is more potent than history

Dreams are more powerful than facts

Hope always triumphs over experience

Laughter is the only cure for grief

And love is stronger than death.
